

## ABSTRACT

### SOCIAL WORK

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#### AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF TELEVISION VIOLENCE AND IT'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

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This study examined the effect television violence has on a child's aggressive behaviors. More specifically, this research examined children's perceptions of television violence and it's influence on their behavior. The study used a forty-item television survey called a Television Assessment Survey. The questions in the survey attempted to describe the amount and type of programs children watch, assess how children feel about violence on television and determine if and how television influenced their behavior. The sample population drawn for this study included teenagers from a residential treatment facility and teenagers from a local junior high school who were invited to attend a teenage social, resulting in a sample size of thirty-one participants. Each participant was chosen purposively, the researcher was given the opportunity to select the most representative participants for the study who were all the children who met the criteria. On November 16, 1998 and November 27, 1998, all of the data were collected between the hours 3:40 pm to 4:40 pm at the treatment facility and 7:00 pm to 11:00 pm at the teenage social. However, findings indicate that children's perceptions of television

violence had no effect on the aggressive behaviors they exhibited. These results did not support the hypothesis. There were no correlations between their perception of television violence and their behavior. The most likely explanation is that a television survey alone cannot measure perceptions and the sample size was not large enough to detect a relationship

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF TELEVISION  
VIOLENCE AND IT'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Due to the increase of violence and crime committed by youth in society, the negative effects of television on their behavior should be given much attention. Children today are growing up in a new kind of environment. The amount and type of violence on television is very different from the past. Children have gone from watching programs such as Sesame Street and Mister Rogers to Power Rangers, The Simpson's and New York Undercover. Television has become the "The Plug-In-Drug" (Winn,1997).

Since the 1950's, television watching has quickly become one of society's favorite past times (Signorelli, 1991). About 99% of American households contain at least one television (Comstock and Strasburger, 1990). It is estimated that a television set is on for more than seven hours each day in an American household and the children that are watching range from age two to eleven (Andreasen, 1990; Libert and Sprafkin, 1988). Statistics have also indicated that a television set is in every home and the first thing a child does when she or he awakes is turn it on (Signorelli, 1991).

Television stories provide information to society and children about life, people, places, things and power. These stories present the good and the bad, happy and sad and tells society who is successful and who is a failure. Television and children have a natural attachment. It has become our children primary storyteller, their "window on the world" (Comstock, 1990).

Children begin watching television before they can talk or walk. It is part of their everyday lives. At a very young age, a child's attention is drawn to the lively music, sound effects, voices, characters, and high levels of action and physical attention television sends. Children watch television for entertainment, to pass the time, to relax and as a learning tool.

According to The Harris Survey (1977) forty-three percent of American adults believe that television violence plays a part in making America a violent society. However, approximately only half of American parents have given up setting limits on what their children watch on television. Statistics have shown that twenty-five percent of American adults feel that they do not make enough money to persuade them to stop watching television (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 1992). Watching television is essential to lives of low income and minority families, due to the lack of alternative activities (Hutson, Watkins & Kunkel, 1989).

Therefore, television to some could be viewed as good, and to others as a problem because television has such a large influence on children. Between 1982 and 1988, the amount of television time devoted to war cartoons has increased from ninety minutes to twenty-seven hours a week. Comstock and Strasburger (1993) believe that children's programming is even more violent than prime-time programming. Television has been said to create false assumptions about life and how to handle situations. It teaches our children how to behave and assures them that their own behaviors are appropriate (Viemero & Paajanen, 1991; Vooijs & Van Der Voort, 1993).

Many children do not realize that some of the things characters do cannot be done in real life. The images a child sees on television are sometimes confusing to them and

therefore, they give their own interpretation to what they see (Vooijs & Voort, 1993). Children model what they see on television with their peers, family and friends (Lazar, 1994). The characters children watch on television have become their heroes and role models. Parents and teachers are no longer seen as all-powerful to them.

With this in mind, it is very essential for social workers to be concerned with the effect television violence has on a child's behavior. When dealing with the welfare of children, social workers see a child's well being as an important issue. There have been all types of laws and policies implemented in order to protect children from the unhealthy effects of exposure to unsavory material such as internet pornography, violent records and lyrics, sexual content in movies and videos, alcohol and tobacco. Therefore, the amount of time a child spends watching violent television programs justifies why they should be concerned. Television is so much a part of a child's social environment that social workers need to be actively involved in how television violence influences their development. As children talk violently, play violently, and draw violent images, social workers need to be concerned whether a child's behavior is precipitated by something that happened to them or something that they have seen on television.

Children who have been negatively affected by television violence sometimes see the world as a dangerous place (Signoreilli, 1991). They learn from television that aggression is a successful and acceptable way to achieve goals and solve problems (Comstock and Paik, 1991). To date, the Surgeon Generals Report (1972) indicates that there are over one thousand studies which support the argument that large doses of television violence desensitizes children and causes them to develop aggressive behaviors (Fredrich-Cofer and Hudson, 1986; Josephson, 1987; Comstock and Strasburger, 1993;

Miltor and Hirsch, 1994; Paik and Comstock, 1994; Sweet and Singh, 1994; Markham, 1995; and Tulloch, 1995). Children use violent programs as a way of communicating with one another.

In addition, social workers and teachers have observed children on the playground as they run around pretending to be Power Rangers, Warriors and Turtles (Lazar, 1996). Children who have been exposed to violent programs recreate what they see. Therefore, with this known factor, social workers need to further investigate television violence with children. Many have realized that television violence has increased in recent years and has become an important influence in the daily lives of our children. Also, violence on television has a lot to do with the aggressive behaviors children display. So while some social workers feel that a child's experience with television violence should only be explored when a child's behavior is extreme, they should realize that a lot of these behaviors are learned through television .

#### Statement of Problem

Based on previous studies and the rising statistics of violent crimes committed by youth in today's society, numerous researchers have indicated that television violence has an effect on children's behaviors. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the extent to which television violence influences children's behaviors. It is the intent of this investigation to examine how the relationship between children's perception of watching violent television programs contribute to their aggressive behaviors.

### Significance of Study

The significance of this particular study is to help us understand how children perceive television violence and how what they observe affects their behavior patterns. Television is so much a part of children's everyday lives that violence on television should be a primary concern for social workers, parents and policy makers. These people should be concerned with what children are watching on television. They should be concerned that when children are watching television for long periods of time, they recreate what they see without really understanding what is going on.

Therefore, this study should help social workers, parents, and teachers realize that it is essential to teach our children how to process violence more critically, so that they might be less influenced by what they see. By doing so, this will help educators and policy makers to see the importance of playing active roles in protecting children from some of the violent messages television sends. Also, this study should help the social work profession to realize that they should speak out against television violence and for quality educational programming.

### Hypothesis

The key hypothesis of this study is:

HO: A child's perception of television violence will have no effect on his or her aggressive behaviors.

Which will be tested against the alternative:

HA: A child's perception of television violence will have an effect on his or her aggressive behaviors.

### Research Questions

Based on the general purpose of this study, the following research questions will be addressed (a) Does television violence influence a child's aggressive behaviors? (b) Is there a relationship between the number of hours a child watches television and his or her aggressive behaviors? (c) Is there a relationship between gender and aggressive behaviors? (d) Is a child's perception of violence on television a result of his or her expressing aggressive behavior?

### Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two, The Literature Review is a summary of previous recorded works produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners who have explored the effects and relationship between television violence and children behaviors.

Chapter Three, The Methodology is a thorough description of where the study took place, who participated, when and how the study was measured and how it was performed. This section aims to provide information about how children's perception of television violence was assessed.

Chapter Four, The Presentation of Findings discusses the results of the data that explored children's perception of television violence and the effects they had on their aggressive behaviors. This section also analyzes the research questions presented and interesting components of the data that were found after the statistical analysis.

Chapter Five, The Summary and Conclusion brings closure to the study. It indicates whether or not the hypothesis was accepted or rejected. This section of the paper discusses the significant information and relationships that were found between

children's perceptions of television violence and their aggressive behaviors.

Chapter Six, Implications for Social Workers provides information to future researchers about the significance of exploring children's perceptions of television violence. Also, it will help future researchers to become more familiar with the effects of television violence on children.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature for this study is a summary of previous recorded works produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners who have explored the effects and relationship of television violence on children's behaviors. This chapter is divided into four sections: Violence on Television and Aggressive Behaviors, Children's Perception of Television Violence, Difference in Television Violence by Gender, and Summary of Perspectives.

A growing body of research has indicated that television violence has an effect on children displaying aggressive behavior on the playground and later on in life as adolescents( Viemero and Paajanen, 1991; Vooijs and Van Der Voort, 1993; Signorielli, 1991; Comstock and Strasburger, 1993). Television violence which is defined as programs that involve teasing, yelling, vulgarity, slapping, kicking, fighting and killing are steadily increasing in number. These programs have not only increased in number from the past, but have also changed in content. Sesame Street, Captain Kangaroo, Long Ranger and Howdy Doody no longer entertain children. Children are now watching programs such as New York Undercover, Power Rangers, X-men, Martin and The Simpson's (Arnolite, 1997).

Studies have shown that children are more interested in television shows that contain violent content (Lazar, 1994). Children are visually attracted to programs that



have action, and action on television is frequently violent. Some even think that the violence formula is a low - cost, fast- paced device for capturing and holding children's attention (Dorr, 1982). Other researchers believe that violence is a symbolic demonstration of power and values in our society (Gerber and Signorielli, 1990).

Whether the lessons children learn are intentional or unintentional, television has become the most prominent storyteller of our time (Katz, 1992; Comstock, 1990).

Children of today talk the talk of television. Television programs are what is going on in their world. It is a huge part of children's normal everyday lives. Although children's television programs have not been one of social workers primary concerns, the welfare of children has. Therefore, the amount of time most children spend watching television, justifies why social worker's interests have sparked.

Exposure to television images and messages begins at birth for most children. Parents have used television to pacify their infants. By the time of high school graduation, a child will have spent more time watching television than any other activity other than sleeping (American Pediatric Association, 1990). Children will begin to watch television as toddlers and steadily increase their viewing time through pre-adolescence. In a typical American household, the television is on for hours. The average preschooler will have watched an average of twenty-eight hours a week while a school age child averages twenty-four hours a week (Neilsen, 1990). About twenty-four of American households keep a television set in the child's bedroom (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 1992).

### Violence on Television and Aggressive Behaviors

Gerbner and Signorielli (1990) tracked the level of violence over the years and have realized that viewers are consistently subjected to high levels of violence on television. Saturday morning programs average about twenty to twenty-five violent acts per hour. Studies have indicated that by the time a child leaves elementary school, he or she will have witnessed eight thousand murders and one hundred thousand other acts of violence on television without taking into account exposure to cable, and video cassettes (Hutson, Kunkel and Watkins, 1989). Children's programming has steadily increased from 18.5 acts of violence per hour to 26.4 acts per hour (Smith, 1993). So, with the amount of television children are watching today and the increase of violence in our society, researchers have become increasingly interested in the effect television violence has on children's behaviors.

Many researchers have indicated that television violence can destroy a young child's mind. For some, television at its worst is an assault on a child's mind, an influence that upsets moral balance and makes a child prone to aggressive behavior as it warps his or her perceptions of the real world (Livingstone, 1990). The National Association for Education of Young Children (1990) says television violence makes children become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others. Research has also shown that exposure to violence may decrease normal sensitivity to aggression (Dorr, 1982; Zillman, 1982). If people become desensitized to violence from seeing too much of it, they may be less sensitive to real life aggression.

Moreover, they may behave in aggressive or harmful ways towards others and may become fearful of the world around them. Children who are exposed to high doses of violence on TV become desensitized and develop aggressive behaviors (Comstock and Strasburger, 1993; Freiderich-Cofer and Hudson, 1986; Josephson, 1987; Markham, 1995; Militor and Hirsch, 1994; Paik and Comstock, 1994; Sweet and Singh, 1994 & Tulloch, 1995). For example, in a study by Militor and Hirsch of Bowling Green State University and California State University of Sacramento (1994), forty-two fourth and fifth graders were exposed to violent and nonviolent programs on television. Following the exposure the children were brought into a room filled with younger children and were told to monitor their behavior and report any bad behaviors or activities they displayed. In the study, the researcher found that children exposed to violent television tolerated the yelling and fighting more than those exposed to non-violent excerpts (Militor and Hirsch, 1994).

Studies have also shown that heavy viewing was positively correlated with children's fantasies that were anxious, hostile and dysphoric in nature (Huesmann and Eron, 1986). Children who are affected by television violence are more likely to solve problems with aggressive solutions. These solutions include using weapons to solve problems, engaging in fighting, yelling, cursing, teasing, slapping and killing. The violence they see on television assures them that their own behavior is appropriate, or teaches them new technique to use with others (Huesmann and Eron, 1986).

#### Difference in Television Violence by Gender

However, some studies suggest that television violence affects boys and girls differently. Turner, Hesse and Peterson-Lewis (1986) concluded that the balance of

evidence supports the notion that watching television results in long-term aggression in boys but not in girls. Boys are far more susceptible to violence than girls. Boys are more likely to identify themselves with characters on television, and model their behavior (Huesman and Eron, 1986; Huesmann and Eron, 1984). Many social workers state that boys present themes of television-violence in drawings, play and conversation. They see violence on television as a solution to feelings of helplessness (Lazar, 1998).

Parke and Slaby (1983) found that males are more aggressive in their behavior than females. Girls who watch violent programming see it as less realistic, like violence less and are more frightened and upset by the violence (Van Evra, 1990). Females are said to have more negative expectations as to the outcome of their own acts than boys do. Gilligan (1982) examined the gender difference in terms of moral reasoning. He concluded that females are more likely to focus on their reasoning behind the behavior, such as what is morally right. Boys, however, like violent programs.

In one study, William Belson (1978) surveyed 1500 males in London and found that boys who watched above average quantities of television violence before adolescence were committing acts of serious violence at a rate of forty-nine percent higher than those who did not watch as much television. These acts include assault, rape, major vandalism, and homicide. Also, exposure to violence in comic books and films, use of foul language and aggressiveness in sports were associated with higher television exposure. Many felons reported that they learned how to commit crimes and even acted out crimes they had seen on television (Heller and Polsky, 1976). In addition, felons

also reported that as children they watched twice as much television than most children at that time (Centerwall, 1993).

Moreover, many criminal acts involving boys have been positively correlated with violence on television (Palmero, 1995; Belson, 1978). Brandon Centerwall (1975) found that eight years after television was introduced the murder rate skyrocketed. Juvenile crime in the United States rose one hundred sixty-six percent between 1960-1978. By 1988, forty percent of all felons were committed by juveniles ranging in age from twelve to eighteen years (Palmero, 1992).

In another study, Heath, Kruttschnitt and Ward (1986) surveyed men convicted of violent crimes and compared them to men in the same neighborhoods of the convicted criminals. All of the men were asked to indicate the name of the shows they watched between the ages of eight to twelve. The results indicated that adolescents who viewed more television violence engaged in more serious aggressive behaviors. Which in turn leads one to believe that, dramatized television often leads to criminal behavior.

### Children's Perception of Television Violence

Television is said to be one cause of aggressive behaviors, but is certainly not the only factor. Some have even indicated that television provokes anxiety by exposing children to numerous scenes of physical and psychological violence, disconcerting juxtaposition and discontinuities and simply much that is confusing, contradictory and inappropriate to a child's level of psychological development (Chiland and Young, 1994). Sometimes a child can be influenced by television if they believe that the violent acts are a game, so it is easy for the child to imitate those violent actions (Palmero, 1995). In the minds of adolescents, television is a source of factual information that tells them how the

world works. Bandura (1963) states that television shapes behavior by providing examples. Exposure to violence may have different effects on the behaviors of the viewer. It may teach aggressive styles or it may weaken people's disinhibition about behaving aggressively.

Therefore, studies have indicated that children learn to behave by imitating attractive role models, usually their parents, but with television, children prefer to identify themselves with violent characters and scenes (Strasburger, 1993). For example, an Iowa teenager was killed after running in front of a train imitating a scene he saw in the movie, *Stand by Me*. One could argue that television taught this child conflict resolution. He saw the world as being more violent than it really is, so he jumped in front of a train as a solution to the problem. Children who believe in the reality of violence depicted, usually identify themselves with the character on television. They fantasize about the aggression and are more likely to act aggressively after viewing the television violence (Hughes and Hasbrouck, 1996).

Many may not realize it, but children are born with an instinctive desire to imitate, without knowing whether a behavior should be imitated or not. If children are not capable of understanding and digesting what they see on television, they are more likely to 1) emulate these behaviors 2) internalize these behaviors as acceptable and 3) engage in aggressive criminal activity later in life (Viemero and Paajanen, 1991; Vooijs and Van Der Voort, 1993). Not until age seven does a child learn to distinguish between fantasy and reality on television (VanEvra, 1990).

Due to a child's imitative developmental stage, he or she may be vulnerable to what they observe on television. They may lack the capacity to reflect and discriminate.

Children do not realize that some of the things characters do cannot be done in real life. It is assumed that children's perception of social reality is affected by television if they perceive programs as real and have no pre-existing knowledge on the aspect of social reality (Pearl, 1982). Children, particularly preschoolers and younger children may miss some of what is good about television and be more vulnerable to the influence of what is not good.

Children bring various cognitive skills and abilities to television viewing at different ages that will influence what they attend to, perceive and understand of what they have viewed (Shrum, 1995). In addition, most of what children watch on television is intended for adults who are more sophisticated in understanding the purpose and meaning of different programs. If children are able to process television more critically, they might be less influenced by what they see (Anderson, 1983; Corder and Bolz, 1982). When a child perceives something as real, he or she may exert increased mental effort in processing it.

For example in another study, Bandura, (1963) indicated that children imitated the behavior of television characters in much the same way they learn social and cognitive skills by imitating their parents, siblings and peers. In 1963, Bandura and Walters focused upon the role of modeling in the child's social development. They devised an experiment in which they investigated the circumstance under which aggressive acts could be learned and imitated. In this experiment, Bandura and Walters observed the behavior of nursery school children in a playroom filled with toys, and a Bobo doll (a punching bag filled with a sand base and a nose that squeaked).

To begin, each child was taken away from the room with the toys and was divided into two experimental groups and one control group. He placed one experimental group in room in which each child watched a film where a model walked up to the plastic Bobo doll and sat on it, punched it in the nose, pummeled it on the head with a mallet, kicked the doll and threw rubber balls at the Bobo doll. Then following the physical aggression abuse, verbal comments were made such as “stay down,” “boom boom,” “fly away” and “bang.” This sequence of behavior was repeated twice. Afterwards, he took another experimental group of children into a room. These children saw the same series of attacks against a Bobo doll except the attacks were actually performed live by the adult male.

Following the exposure, each child was brought into a room that contained a Bobo doll, three balls, a mallet, a dollhouse and other toys. Bandura and his associates gave the children an opportunity to display imitative aggressive behaviors. Children in the control group displayed few or none modeled behaviors, whereas children who had reviewed the attacks on television or live displayed imitative behaviors. This study concluded that children could model behaviors exhibited by live models as well as seen on film (Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1963). So, just as children could learn aggressive responses from the Bobo doll experiment, they could learn behaviors from cartoon like figures that appear on Saturday morning television.

Then in another study, Steur, Applefield, and Smith (1971) examined a dozen of four-year-olds who watched “Woody Woodpecker” a cartoon full of violence. A dozen other four-year-old children watched “Little Red Hen” a peaceful cartoon. As these children were observed, this study indicated that those who watched Woody



Woodpecker were more likely to fight, verbally accost their classmates, break toys, be disruptive and engage in destructive behavior. The children who watched Little Red Hen displayed no destructive behaviors. This study indicated that children exposed to aggressive cartoons were subsequently more aggressive to their playmates who had watched non-aggressive cartoons. Children found violent characters fun to imitate.

Leron Eron and Rowell Huesmann (1987) found that watching violence on television is the single best predictor of violent or aggressive behavior children display later in life, ahead of such commonly accepted factors such as parents, poverty, and race. They told Congress that television violence effects youngsters of all ages, of both genders at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence. The effect of violence is not limited to children who are of low socioeconomic status. Adolescents are attracted to television violence because of their idiosyncratic predisposition to aggression and may use television violence as a justification for their own behavior. Violent television programs appeal to the emotionally frustrated and at times physically deprived individuals through a conditioning effect, that violent television may channel their repressed or semi-conscious hostility into conscious antisocial explosive behaviors (Palmero, 1995).

Violence on television teaches our children a whole new set of values and norms. Some researchers indicated that television violence can be seen as an unhealthy intrusion into a child's learning process, substituting easy pictures for the discipline of reading and concentrating and transforming the young viewer into a hypnotized non-thinker (Livinstone, 1990). The programs children see on television can change their behavior. If they look at violent or aggressive programs, they tend to become more aggressive and

disobedient (Pearl, 1982). Violence on television can activate aggressive thoughts and feelings leading to an increase probability of aggression (Lazar, 1994).

### Summary of Perspectives

In summation, there have been mixed perspectives on the importance of children's exposure to violence on television. Some social workers, do not see television violence as priority for society (Eron and Huesmann, 1987; Minow, 1995). These social workers do not see a direct link between television viewing and children's behaviors. These social workers indicated that when they looked for the cause of the problems, they focused on the family (Lazar, 1998).

Social workers suggested that children's play, drawing, and conservation should only be directly correlated with television violence, if a child's behavior is extreme or unusual (Lazar, 1996). For example, an extreme behavior would be if a child draws headless, bloody figures, stabbed a doll after seeing *Child's Play* and cannot sleep because of Freddie Krueger. These social workers did not recognize television viewing as being an activity that engages most of a child's time. They indicated that television is so much a part of a child's play, that they should only intervene if a child's behavior is extremely fearful, violent, or sexually inappropriate.

On the other hand, some social workers as well as parents and policy makers are interested in the social significance to both children and society of potential negative effects (Berkowitz, 1984; Huesman and Eron, 1986; Singer and Singer, 1986; Gerbner and Signorielli, 1990). Those who might be concerned about the few children who will imitate violence, should also focus upon the majority of children who may

become fearful, insecure, dependent upon authority and who may grow up demanding protection and even welcoming repression in the name of security due to television. Social workers have also noticed that heavy viewer are more susceptible to television messages and constructions (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli, 1980). Sprakin, and Libert (1988) found that children labeled “emotionally disturbed” by the school system watch more programs with aggressive content than their agemates in regular classes.

Also, many educators have reported that there has been an increase in children’s aggression both on the playground and classroom in the past decade (Barlow and Hill, 1985). Social workers have observed that play is an integral part of the school day (Lazar, 1996). On the playground, children run around pretending to be the characters on television. They noticed that the children love the Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers, Terminator and Freddie Krueger. Children who are exposed to a lot of violence draw monsters, daggers and dead bodies (Lazar, 1996). They love blood and thinks it is fun.

Television plays a huge role in a child’s life. Social Workers realize as some children watch television they give their own meaning to messages sent. Children are more likely to perceive television as real, which places them at greater risk for using aggression to solve problems. Therefore, this research study will examine a child’s perception of television violence and it’s influence on a child’s behavior.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the relationship between children’s behavior and their interpretation of television violence. Previous studies have demonstrated that there is a relationship between television violence and aggressive behaviors by exposing children to violent television programs and observing their

behaviors. However, instead of analyzing their actual behaviors, this study will focus on how they perceive what they watch. This study should help social workers and others understand if children are able to become literate consumers of television and differentiate reality from fiction. This study will help future researchers to realize that many children imitate behaviors learned from television without really knowing if a behavior should be imitated or not. Therefore, the key hypothesis of this study is:

HO: A child's perception of television violence will have no effect on his or her aggressive behaviors.

Which will be tested against the alternative:

HA: A child's perception of television violence will have an effect on his or her aggressive behaviors.

## Definitions

**Aggression:** Violating by forcing the rights of others/ property, offensive action, assault, and hostility.

**Television Violence:** Programs that involve teasing, yelling, cursing, slapping, fighting, kicking, shooting and killing.

**Desensitize:** Not affected by violent acts, no feeling, reduce sensitivity.

**Perception:** How one interprets a situation or views a situation. His or her understanding.

**Habitual viewing:** To dwell, one who becomes fixed to the same routine.

**Light viewing:** One who observes little to no hours of television a day.

**Moderate viewing :** One who watches at least three hours of television a day.

**Heavy viewing:** One who observes more than three hours of television a day.

**Violence:** Rough, unjust, to hurt, to kill.

**Social Reality:** True to life, events similar to those that would likely be encountered in real life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Setting

The data for this study were collected at two sites. The first site was a twenty-four hour residential treatment facility located in Northwest Atlanta. This facility focuses on the needs and welfare of children within the context of families and communities. At this facility, adolescents between the ages of thirteen to seventeen are provided with comprehensive treatment, case management services, educational services, specialized counseling and home-base aftercare services. All of the children who enter this program have been abused in some shape or form. Many are suicidal, have used drugs, have histories of truancy, delinquency and violent behaviors. The facility offers safe passage for teenagers in crisis.

The second site was located in downtown New Orleans, Louisiana. Participants at this site were between the age of eleven to seventeen. These participants were junior high school students and high school students who were invited to attend a teenage social in downtown New Orleans. All of the children who attended this social were from middle class backgrounds and are considered to have experienced "normal" childhood experiences.

### Sampling

There were thirty-one participants in the final sample population. All were adolescents between the age of eleven to seventeen. Seventeen participants were African Americans, and fourteen were Caucasian. Fifty-five percent of the participants were residents at a treatment facility in Georgia. The other forty-five percent were students that attended a teenage social located in New Orleans, Louisiana.

There were a total of fifteen female and sixteen males. Three participants came from single child homes while the remaining twenty-eight indicated that there were other siblings in the home. Twenty-six percent were from divorced homes, thirty-nine percent were from separated homes, twenty-three percent were from homes where their parents were married, and twelve had no response to that question. The sampling technique was purposive sampling, where the researcher was given the opportunity to select the most representative participants.

On average, the study participant's ages ranged from eleven to seventeen. Half of the participants were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have suffered from some type of abuse whether is emotional, physical, or sexual. The other half were from middle class backgrounds and have encountered normal childhood experiences. Of the participants in the study, fifty-five percent were from unstable homes that exhibited economic deprivation, substance abuse, mental illness, criminal histories and violence, the remaining forty-five percent were from stable home environments. This study sample may not be considered a representation of the overall population in the United States, but the target population can provide information to future researchers who

may be interested correlating behavior patterns of children who are heavy television viewers.

### Measures

There was one instrument used for this study, The Television Violence Assessments Survey (T.V.A.S) which was formulated by the researcher. This survey consisted of 40-items divided into three sections. The first section of the survey, items one through seven asked questions about demographic information. The second section, items eight through twenty-two, contained questions about the type of programs they watch, who they watch television with, and how they behave in a given situation. Lastly, the third section, items twenty-three through forty, focused on children's perception of television and how television makes them feel or behave. Items were measured on a Likert type scale where 1=never, 2=sometimes and 3= always. The scale ranged from forty to seventy-two. Forty to fifty indicate a minimum influence; fifty-one to sixty-one indicating a medium influence and sixty-two to seventy-two indicating large influence.

This measure displayed reliability but very little validity. Reliability was measured by asking a number of the same questions in different ways. However, the survey was not quite valid due to population, design, and sample instrument.

### Design

This study utilized a post test only experimental design. In notational form, the design can be depicted as:

**X O**



where  $X$  = Students perceptions

$O$  = the measure (television survey)

This type of design rules out morality, instrumentation and testing but there may be possible threats of selection, maturation and history. In this type of design, the subjects may not be honest. They may give the response they think the researcher is looking for. Also, selection – maturation may occur due to the fact that each group changes at a different rate.

It is hypothesized that children with behavior disorders are more apt to be affected by television violence than those who are not. Therefore, it might be difficult to conclude that television violence is directly correlated with aggressive behaviors. A child with a behavior disorder may exhibit aggressive behaviors because he or she may have a history of abuse or come from a home where this type of behavior is the norm. Moreover, this type of design should help the researcher to detect any significant differences that may occur between the two groups. In summary, this design will provide information about the extent to which the subjects were influenced by television violence and help the researcher to determine if there was a direct relationship between children's perceptions of television violence and their aggressive behaviors.

### Procedures

On Monday November 16, 1998 between the hours of 3:40-4:00 pm at the treatment facility and Friday, November 27, 1998 between the hours of 7:00-11:00 pm at the teenage social the data were collected. All participants from the treatment facility completed the survey in a classroom type setting where the researcher administered the

survey to the participants. The participants from the teenage social completed the survey in a waiting room setting where the researcher administered the survey.

For those who had trouble understanding the questions, the researcher was present to clarify the questions. The purpose of the study was explained including each section of the survey. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality, informed about the risk of participating and were given the opportunity to decline to participate. Of those chosen, everyone at the facility participated. At the social, four refused to participate.

All of the questions at both sites were read aloud before the survey was completed so that any questions that were unclear were addressed. All the participants at each site were given one hour to complete the survey. The average time taken to complete the survey was thirty minutes. After the survey was completed, the data were collected and the children were given the opportunity to discuss any items on the survey that they found confusing or offer suggestions.

Of those participants, two at the facility and two at the social indicated that they “do not like to fight.” Two at the facility indicated that the survey should have a category called “most of the time.” One participant at the social suggested that the survey “should have been put on color paper or had drawings on it in order to make the survey more interesting.” Lastly, one participant at the facility indicated that they “would have preferred to watch a video and have their behavior observed.” The remaining twenty-three had no questions or suggestions and continued their daily activities without any hesitation.

### Analysis of Data

The method of data analysis used consisted of descriptive and inferential statistics. In descriptive statistics, the frequency distribution, mean and standard deviations were used to describe the demographic information. Inferential statistical tests, including a Pearson's  $r$  Correlation Coefficient, T-test and Chi square were used to explore the relationship between television violence and aggressive behaviors in children and explore subgroup differences. The data were entered into the computer and the results were analyzed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Pearson's R Correlation Coefficient, T-test and Chi-square were used to analyze whether or not there was a relationship between a child's perception of television violence and his or her aggressive behaviors. Therefore, several variables were measured in order to test the hypothesis. This study was particularly interested if a child's perception of violence on television had an effect on his or her aggressive behaviors. Four research questions were explored: Is there a relationship between gender and a child's aggressive behaviors? Is there a relationship between a child's aggressive behaviors and the number of hours he or she watches television? Does television violence influence a child's aggressive behaviors? Is a child's perception of violence on television a result of his or her aggressive behaviors?

The independent variable in this study was children's perception of television violence and the dependent variable was children responding behaviors. In the study, descriptive statistics, frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation were used to describe the demographic information. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the two sites.

Table 1

Demographic Table (N=31)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sample (N=31)</b>	<b>Residential Facility (N=17)</b>	<b>Social (N=14)</b>
<b>Age Mean</b>	16	16	16
<b>Race</b>			
<i>Black</i>	17	6	11
<i>Caucasian</i>	14	11	3
<b>Parents</b>			
<i>Divorced</i>	8	6	2
<i>Separated</i>	12	6	6
<i>Married</i>	7	2	5
<i>Unknown</i>	4	3	1
<b>Siblings</b>			
<i>One child</i>	3	1	2
<i>Two to one</i>	16	8	8
<i>Three or more</i>	12	8	4
<b>Sex</b>			
<i>Male</i>	16	9	7
<i>Female</i>	15	9	6

Source: Television Assessment Survey 1999. Note. N=The number of participants

According to these data, the demographic information indicates that the mean age was sixteen. Fifteen of the participants were female and sixteen were male. Seventeen were African Americans and fourteen were Caucasian. Of those responding, eight were from divorced families, twelve parents were separated, seven were married and four did not respond at all to the question. Twenty-eight of the participants indicated that they lived in homes where there were at least one other sibling.

Moreover, according to the research questions, the hypothesis was concerned if children perception of television violence has an effect on their aggressive behaviors. Therefore, several correlations were analyzed. One in particular can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Pearson's Correlations of Children's Perception vs Aggressive Behaviors (N=31)

	Fight when see fighting		Imitate Characters		Violence to solve problems		TV teach about life	
	r =	p =	r =	p =	r =	p =	r =	p =
Fight when see fighting	1.0000	.000	.5409	.002	.4994	.004	.0083	.965
Imitate characters	.5409	.002	1.0000	.000	.5190	.003	-.0380	.839
Identify with characters	.3191	.080	.3860	.032	.5502	.001	.2477	.79
Violence to solve problems	.4994	.004	.5190	.003	1.0000	.000	-.1725	.354
Television teaches about life	.0083	.965	-.0380	.839	-.1725	.354	1.0000	.000
Believe TV stories I see	.0699	.709	.1669	.369	.2893	.114	.1531	.411
Television teaches me to behave	-.0039	.984	-.0740	.693	.0092	.961	.2292	.215

SPSS Data from Television Assessment Survey, 1999    P< .05    r = Correlation

Pearson's  $r$  indicate that there were no significant relationships among the independent and dependent variables. There was a slight correlation between the variables "I believe the stories I watch on television" and "I identify with characters on television." Pearson's  $r$  was .4397 with a  $p$  value of .013. The variable, "I use violence to solve problems" was correlated with the variable "I identify with characters" had a  $r=.5502$  with a  $p=.001$ .

Variables "I believe the stories I watch on television" and "I use violence to solve problems" had an  $r=.2893$  with a  $p=.114$ . Variables, "Television teaches me how to behave" and "I imitate characters on television" had an  $r=-.0740$  with a  $p=.693$ . Variables, "Television teaches me about life" and "I want to fight when I see fighting on television" had an  $r=.0083$  with a  $p=.965$ . The independent variables "Television teaches me about life," "I believe the stories I watch on television" and "Television teaches me how to behave" showed no correlation between the dependent variables, "I want to fight when I see fighting on television," "I imitate characters on television", and "I use violence I learned from television to solve problems."

However, when the dependent variables were correlated among each other, there were several significant values. Variable, "I use violence to solve problems" moderately correlated with several other variables. "I identify with characters" had a  $r=.5502$  with a  $p=.001$ . "I want to fight when I see fighting on television" had a  $r=.4994$  with a  $p=.004$ , and "I imitate characters on television" had an  $r=.5190$  with a  $p=.003$ .

The mean and frequency of these variables were also analyzed. However, there were no significant differences found among the variables. Table 3 presents the frequency of the independent and dependent variables.



Table 3

Frequency of Independent Variables vs Dependent Variables (N=31)

Variable	Reponses	Frequency
Fight when see fighting	Never	21
	Sometimes	9
	Always	1
Imitate Characters	Never	10
	Sometimes	15
	Always	6
Violence to Solve Problems	Never	22
	Sometimes	9
Believe T.V. stories	Never	10
	Sometimes	21
T.V. teaches me about life	Never	5
	Sometimes	24
	Always	2
Teaches to behave	Never	14
	Sometimes	17

Source: SPSS Data from Television Assessment Survey 1999

The independent variable "Television teaches me about life" indicated that five participants recorded never, twenty-four indicated sometimes and two indicated always. Ten of the participants indicated that "I believe the stories I see on television" never and twenty-one indicated sometimes. Fourteen participants indicated that "Television never teaches me how to behave" and seventeen indicated sometimes. Dependent variables, "I want to fight when I see fighting" had a frequency of twenty-one indicating never, nine indicating sometimes and one indicating always. Ten participants indicated that they never imitate characters, fifteen indicated sometimes and six indicated always. Twenty-two participants never use violence learned from television to solve problem and nine used violence to solve problems sometimes.

Data indicated that there were no significant differences found among the variables. However, crosstabs correlations indicated that of the fourteen participants who responded that they believe stories they watch on television also indicated that “never” want to fight when they see fighting. Six participants who indicated that television “sometimes” teaches me about life, indicated that “sometimes” they want to fight when they see fighting on television. Fourteen participants who indicated that they “sometimes” imitate characters reported that television teaches them about life “sometimes.” Ten participants indicated that television “never” teaches them how to behave, “never” use violence to solve problem. But, five participants who indicated television teaches them how to behave “sometimes”, also indicated that they “never” use violence to solve problems. None of the variables showed a significant difference in order to determine if television violence influence aggressive behaviors or not.

Moreover, in exploring the number of hours television was watched and aggressive behaviors, several variables were analyzed. The mean of these variables could be found in table 4.

Table 4

The Number of Hours T.V. was watched vs. Behaviors

Hours watch tv		Imitate Characters	Teaches about Life	Violence to Solve prob.	Teaches to Behave	Believe T.V. Stories
One Hr.	mean	2.20	1.80	1.40	1.80	1.60
	N	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
	Std. Dev.	.84	.84	.55	.45	.55
Two Hrs.	mean	2.13	1.75	1.50	1.50	1.88
	N	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00
	Std. Dev.	.83	.46	.53	.53	.35
Three Hrs.	mean	1.67	2.00	1.17	1.50	1.61
	N	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
	Std. Dev.	.59	.34	.38	.51	.50

Source: SPSS data from Television Assessment Survey 1999 Note. N=number of participants, Std. Dev.=standard deviation

Of these variables fifty-eight percent indicated that they watched at least three or more hours of television. Data indicated that those who watch three or more hours of television had a mean of 1.67 for imitation of characters, 1.17 for "I use violence to solve problems," 1.61 for "I believe the stories I see" and 1.50 for "Television teaches me how to behave." The mean for the variables that watch one hour of television a day is 2.00 for imitation of characters, 1.40 for "I use violence to solve problems," 1.60 for "I believe television stories" and 1.80 for "Television teaches me how to behave."

Crosstabs indicate that thirteen participants who watch three or more hours of television "never" want to fight when they see fighting on television, whereas those whose watch one hour a day, "sometimes" want to fight when they see fighting on television. Ten participants who watched three or more hours of television imitate characters "sometimes," whereas the two participants who indicated that they imitate characters "always" only watch television one hour a day. Fifteen participants who watch three or more hours of television indicated that they "never" use violence to solve problems, and four participants who watch two hours a day use violence to solve problems "sometimes." Information concerning these variables could be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Crosstabs of Aggressive Behaviors vs Hours Television watched (N=31)

		One hour	Two Hours	Three/more hrs	
<b>Fight when see fighting</b>	Never	2	6	13	21
	Sometimes	3	1	5	9
	Always		1		1
<b>Imitate characters</b>	Never	1	2	7	10
	Sometimes	2	3	10	15
	Always	2	3	1	6
<b>Violence to solve problems</b>	Never	3	4	15	22
	Sometimes	2	4	3	9
	Always				

Source: SPSS data from Television Assessment Survey 1999

The T-test group statistics examined the differences between male and female perceptions of television violence and their aggressive behaviors. Data suggest a small difference. These values can be found in Table 6 and Table 7 where the mean and frequency of the variables were reported.

Table 6

Differences in Gender (N=31)

Variable	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sig
Fight when see fighting	Female	15	1.27	.59	.519
	Male	16	1.44	.51	
Imitate characters	Female	15	1.73	.70	.593
	Male	16	2.00	.73	
Violence to solve problems	Female	15	1.07	.26	.000
	Male	16	1.50	.52	
Teaches about life	Female	15	1.93	.46	.559
	Male	16	1.88	.50	
Identify with characters	Female	15	1.40	.51	.133
	Male	16	1.88	.50	
Believe T.V. stories	Female	15	1.67	.49	.813
	Male	16	1.69	.48	
Teaches to behave	Female	15	1.47	.52	.392
	Male	16	1.63	.50	

Source: SPSS data from Television Assessment Survey 1999

Table 7

Crosstabs of Television Violence vs. Gender(N=31)

		Female	Male	Total
<b>Fight when see fighting</b>	Never	12	9	21
	Sometimes	2	7	9
	Always	1		1
<b>Imitate characters</b>	Never	6	4	10
	Sometimes	7	8	15
	Always	2	4	6
<b>Violence to solve problems</b>	Never	14	8	22
	Sometimes	1	8	9
	Always			

Source: SPSS data from Television Assessment Survey 1999

The mean for imitation of character for females was 1.73 with a standard deviation of .70 and the mean for males was 2.00 with a standard deviation of .73. Females had a mean of 1.27 with a standard deviation of .59 for the variable, "I want to fight when I see fighting." The males had a mean of 1.44 with a standard deviation of .51. The mean for "I use violence I learned from television to solve problems" for females was 1.07 with a standard deviation of .26 and for males the mean was 1.50 with standard deviation of .52.

Correlational crosstabs indicate that twelve females "never" want to fight when they see fighting on television, two indicated "sometimes" and one indicated "always." Nine males "never" want to fight when they see fighting on television and seven indicated "sometimes." Six females "never" imitate characters, seven imitate "sometimes" and two imitate "always." Four males imitate characters "never," eight imitate "sometimes" and four imitate "always." Eight males indicated that they "never" use violence to solve problem and eight indicate that they use violence "sometimes." Fourteen females "never" use violence to solve problems and one indicated "sometimes."

As the two different sites were analyzed, the dependent variables and independent variables focusing on a child's aggressive behaviors were tested. These results can be found in Table 8.

Table 8

T-Test Statistics between sites (N=31)

	Sites	N=31	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig
Fight when see fighting	Facility	17	1.41	.62	.178
	Social	14	1.29	.47	
Imitate characters	Facility	17	1.94	.83	.160
	Social	14	1.79	.58	
Violence to solve problems	Facility	17	1.29	.47	.921
	Social	14	1.29	.47	
T.V. teaches about life	Facility	17	1.82	.53	.065
	Social	14	2.00	.39	
Identify with characters	Facility	17	1.76	.44	.025
	Social	14	1.50	.65	
Believe t.v. stories	Facility	17	1.65	.49	.441
	Social	14	1.71	.47	
Teaches to behave	Facility	17	1.53	.51	.667
	Social	14	1.57	.51	

Source: SPSS data from Television Assessment Survey 1999

The minimum for the variables was one and the maximum was three. Variable, "I use violence to solve problems" showed no difference between the means of the sites. The mean of these two variables was 1.29 with a standard deviation of .47. For the variable, "I imitate characters," the residential facility had a mean of 1.94 and the social had a mean of 1.79. The social mean for the variable "I want to fight when I see fighting on television" was 1.29 and the mean for the residential facility was 1.41. The residential facility indicated the mean for "Television shows them new ways to fight" was 1.59 and the social was 1.57.

The independent variable, "Television teaches me about life" had a mean of 1.82 for the residential facility and 2.00 for the social. "I believe the stories I see" had a mean

of 1.65 for the residential facility and 1.75 for the social. "Television teaches me how to behave" had a mean of 1.53 for the facility and 1.57 for social. The minimum for these variables was one and the maximum was three. Data indicated that there were no significant differences found among the variables.

Correlation crosstabs indicate that eleven of the participants at the residential facility "never" want to fight when they see fighting on television, whereas those from the social, five want to fight "sometimes" and one wanted to fight "always." Six participants at the residential facility indicated that they "never" imitate characters, six indicated "sometimes" and five indicated "always." At the social, four "never" imitated characters, nine "sometimes" and one "always." Ten participants at the social "never" use violence to solve problems and five used violence "sometimes." Eight participants at the social indicated that television "never" shows them new ways to fight, four indicated "sometimes" and two indicated "always." Ten participants at the residential facility indicated television "never" shows them new ways to fight, four indicated "sometimes" and two indicated always." Table 9 shows the results of these data.

Table 9

Crosstabs of Television Violence vs. Sites (N=31)

		Res. Facility	Social	Total
<b>Fight when see fighting</b>	Never	11	10	21
	Sometimes	5	4	9
	Always	1		1
<b>Imitate characters</b>	Never	6	4	10
	Sometimes	6	9	15
	Always	5	1	6
<b>Violence to solve problems</b>	Never	12	10	22
	Sometimes	5	4	9
	Always			

Source: SPSS Data from Television Assessment Survey 1999

There were several other variables that were measured. Some of which were the types of programs watched, whom they watched television with, how television makes them feel and their understanding of television programs. When the sample population was asked with whom they watch television, only ten percent indicated that they “always” watched television with their parents while sixty-eight percent watched with their parents “sometimes” and twenty-three percent “never” watched television with parents. Ninety percent reported that they “sometimes” watched television with peers or siblings and ten percent “always” watched television with peers or siblings. Seventy-four percent “sometimes” watched television alone, sixteen percent “never” watch television alone and ten- percent “always” watch television alone.

According to these data, of those who watch television alone, eighteen participants reported that “sometimes” they want to fight when they see fighting on television. Seven participants who watch a large amount of television like to watch programs they could imitate where as ten participants who watch a lot of television reported that they “never” behave like characters. Also, those who “always” watch television alone had a mean of three with one being the minimum and three being the maximum. These participants indicated that they “always” understood television. These data indicate that those who watch television alone did not show a significant difference between those who never watch television alone.

In examining the types of programs children watch, nineteen percent liked programs with a “little blood,” forty-eight percent liked program with “some blood” and thirty-two percent like program with “a lot of blood.” Those who like programs with some blood indicated that they “sometimes” believe television stories. Twenty-nine



percent of those participants who use violence to solve problems reported that they sometimes like television programs with "some blood." Those participants who reported that they "always" understood television like program with "some blood." Data indicate that participants that watch more than three hours of television prefer programs with "some blood" and "a lot of blood." Also, fifty-one percent of the participants who prefer to watch programs with "some blood" or "a lot of blood" tend to identify with characters.

To examine how a child may feel when watching television, several variables were measured. Thirty-five percent reported that they "never" feel anxious watching television, fifty-five percent feel anxious "sometimes" and ten percent feels anxious "always." Sixteen percent "never" get excited when they see fighting on television, fifty-five percent get excited "sometimes" and twenty-nine get excited "always." Data also indicate that the same number of children who get anxious or excited when they watch television is the same as when they watch television alone or with parents or under supervision. Television violence may influence behaviors but according to the data there was no relationship between whom children watch television with and how they behave.

The relationship between the variable "I understand the programs I watch" and "I believe the stories I see on television" was measured also. Thirteen participants indicated that they understood television "sometimes" and eighteen participants indicated that they "always" understood television. Data indicate that those who reported that they "always" understood programs, "never" like to imitate programs they watch. Eleven participants reported that when they "always" understand television, they "sometimes" feel anxious when watching television, but twelve participants indicated that they never want to fight when they see fighting on television. Only five participants indicated that

they “always” understand television and always get excited when they see fighting on television.

Crosstabs indicate that the more children understand television, the less likely they will behave like characters. Eleven participants who reported that they “always” understand television, “never” behave like characters, whereas those who “sometimes” understand television behave like characters “sometimes.” None of the participants indicated that they “never” understood television. These results are found in table 10.

Table 10

Understand TV. vs. Behave like Characters (N=31)

Understand t.v.	Behave like characters			Total
	Never	Sometimes	Always	
sometimes	5	8		13
never	11	5	2	18
	16	13	2	31
chi-square Tests	Value	Df	Asymp.Sig (2-sided)	
Pearson	4.246	2	.120	
Likelihood ratio	4.967	2	.083	
Linear by Linear association	.258	1	.611	
N of valid cases	31			

Source: SPSS Data from Television Assessment Survey 1999 Note. Df=degrees of

freedom

In summary, the data from this survey indicate that children’s perceptions of television violence had no effect on their aggressive behaviors. One might assume that if the population was larger, a significant relationship may have existed between several variables. However, despite the many statistical analysis no effect existed among the variables.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study did not support the research hypothesis. The alternative hypothesis suggested that a child's perception of television violence would have an effect on his or her aggressive behaviors. However, data indicated that there was no direct relationship to support this hypothesis. In examining the variables in the Pearson  $r$  correlation, there were no significant relationships found between the independent and dependent variables in the study. The dependent variable showed a slight correlation among each other, but did not show any significant correlation between a child's perception of television violence.

Previous research indicates that children who are exposed to high doses of television violence are less sensitive, develop aggressive behaviors, are more likely to solve problems with aggression and tend to imitate the behavior of characters (Huesman and Eron, 1986; Paik and Comstock, 1991; Comstock and Strasburger, 1993; Militor and Hirsch, 1994). Therefore, a number of other variables were analyzed in this study. When the number of hours watched television was analyzed with several variables, data indicated that there was no relationship between aggressive and the number of hours television watched. However, when the number of hours of television of television was correlated with the variable, "I get excited when I see fighting on television," the majority

of participants who watched three or more hours of television get excited when they see fighting on television. This low correlation suggests that there is no relationship between the number of hours children watch television and their aggressive behaviors. Also, data indicated that no matter if children watch television alone, with peers, siblings, or with under parents supervision, the effect is the same.

According to the survey, data indicated that ninety-four percent of the participants watched television and fifty-eight percent watch at least three or more hours of television and twenty-nine percent watch at least two hours of television a day. The survey supports the assertion that television is our children's primary storyteller and one of their favorite past times (Signorelli, 1991; Comstock, 1991).

The findings also indicate that children's perceptions of television violence and its influence on aggressive behaviors shows no difference between males and females. Literature reviews states that males and females are affected by violence differently but according to the data from the survey, there were no significant differences found between the sexes. Crosstabs show that females were less likely to be influenced and exhibit aggressive behaviors than males but the differences between the two were not at all significant ( $r=.397$ ).

According to Huesman and Eron, 1986; Huesman, and Eron, (1984) boys identify themselves with characters on television and model their behavior. But, the findings tells us that thirty-nine percent of males imitate characters, and twenty-nine percent of females imitate characters, that is only a ten- percent difference. Pearson's  $r=.309$ , which was not significant. The amount of males who imitate characters, fight when they see fighting

and use violence to solve problems is closely related to the same amount of females who exhibit the same behaviors.

In addition, findings show no difference between children with behavior disorders and those without. Data indicate that children who are behaviorally disturbed are no more influenced by television violence than those who are considered "normal." Although previous recorded works have indicated that children who are labeled as "emotionally/behaviorally disturbed" are affected by television violence due to the fact that they are more susceptible to violence and are not able to become literate consumers of television (Sprakin and Libert, 1988; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli, 1980). There is no way to determine if children who are behaviorally disturbed were directly influenced by television violence. The results of the participants from the residential facility were almost the same as those from the teenage social. There were no significant differences found.

#### Limitations of the Study

From the sample population of this study, there is no way to determine if the aggressive behaviors children exhibit are a result of television violence or some outside factors such as family, friends, or environment. This study tells us that excessive exposure to television violence may promote violence in some children, especially when they go through a natural but vulnerable stage of development, where they lack the capacity to reflect, discriminate and integrate what they see into proper perspectives. So the findings of this study suggest that despite the fact that previous studies have indicated that a child's perception of television violence effect on his or her behavior, one can not

assume that there is a direct relationship. One must take into consideration that a child's aggressive behaviors may not be influenced by television violence alone. The home, and the environment may have a large effect on how one perceives television and how they behave. Also, due to the fact that those participants with behavior disorders already exhibit aggressive behaviors, there is no way to tell if television violence influence their behavior or not.

Careful attention needs to be paid to the type of instrument and the type of questions used for this type of study due to the fact that aggressive behaviors could be influenced by a variety of factors. Therefore, more direct questions based on a child's perception should have been utilized in order to see a correlation between the variables. Reliability may have been used but validity was weak. Also, a pre-post test design may have been a better approach to this type of study in order to determine how the children behaved was a direct relationship to television violence exposure.

Television violence has been given much attention by many researchers. Any correlation or effects of a child's perception and aggressive behavior can not be used to represent the overall population. The sampling population was too small and not a good representation for the study. There is no way to tell if television violence influence their behavior. This study may help other researchers to see the differences between two totally different populations. This study indicates that television violence does not affect behavior. Therefore, further research is needed to examine these variables. Pearson R showed that of all the variables, none were directly correlated to television violence.

## CHAPTER SIX

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Television violence has been said to have a huge effect on the behaviors children display. Many recorded works have indicated that television violence interferes with children perception of the world, desensitizes them and causes them to develop aggressive behaviors. Therefore, with the growing number of crimes committed by youth, social workers and society should be concerned with the degree television violence influences a child's aggressive behavior and if children are able to become literate consumers of television violence.

So by formulating a television survey, this study attempted to examine the findings of previous studies that television violence influences aggressive behaviors of children. This survey asked children questions about their perception of television, who they watch television with, how they behave after seeing television, and if they understand and believe the programs they watch on television. The intent of this investigation was to help social workers to realize that violence on television should be a priority for social workers because television is so much a part of children's everyday lives. Children's behaviors and thought processes are influenced by television. With this factor in mind, social workers need to further investigate television violence and its influence on children. Social workers need to be aware in any assessment that a child's television environment should be an important issue. Social workers needed to be

concerned with what children are watching, hours spent watching, the number of televisions in the home, when they watch television and their favorite programs so that they can have an idea if their behaviors were learned through television.

Educators and parents should play an active role in teaching children how to become literate consumers of television so that the programs they watch do not interfere with their thought processes. Another implication of this study is to help more people realize that television viewing time should be limited for children, especially those who are labeled as "emotional disturbed." Emotionally disturbed children are more likely to perceive television as real, which places them at greater risk for using what they learn on television to solve problems.

This study could also help social workers and other researchers to know that when studying a topic like children's perception and aggressive behaviors, careful attention needs to be paid to the instrumentation, population, intervention and design so that a larger effect or correlation can be found among the variables. This study should inform other researchers that a survey alone cannot explore a child's perception of television violence and that further research is needed to examine the effects. And lastly, this study should help social workers to realize that children's television is a significant policy issue and that the profession should speak out against television violence and for quality educational programming.



APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN  
RESEARCH PROJECT

This study will attempt to examine if a child's perception of television violence has an effect on his or her aggressive behaviors. It is performed as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for Master's in clinical social work at Clark Atlanta University.

There are no foreseeable risks with this research. If any participants have any problems during the measure, participants have the right to address any questions with the administrator or researcher at any moment. After the research information is gathered, a completed statement of the research project will be available.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that:

1. The time required for the study will be thirty minutes to one hour.
2. The nature of my participation will be one 40-item survey with three sections.
3. My participation is strictly voluntary and I can quit at any time.
4. All my information is confidential.
5. All data is for research purposes only and will not affect my evaluation at the facility.
6. I have turned in my parental consent form to allow me to participate in the study.
7. If I have questions about the research or content in the research, or need to talk to the researcher after the my participation in the study, I can contact the researcher by calling (770) 414-5706 or writing to:

Mia S. White  
3469 Pleasantbrook Village Lane Apt E  
Doraville, Georgia 30340

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: TELEVISION VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT SURVEY

This measurement will be utilized as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's in Clinical Social Work at Clark Atlanta University. Therefore, the purpose of this survey is to examine if a child's perception of television violence has an effect on his or her aggressive behaviors.

### Section I

Please answer the question by circling the most appropriate response.

1. Sex:    Male       Female

2. Age: 11-13  
      14-16  
      17-over

3. Are your parents:  
   a. married  
   b. divorced  
   c. separated

4. How many brothers/sisters you have?  
   a. three or more  
   b. two or one  
   c. I am the only child

5. Do you watch T.V.?  
   a. yes  
   b. no

6. How many hours a day, do you watch T.V. ?  
   a. three or more  
   b. two  
   c. one

7. Race:  
   a. African American  
   b. Caucasian  
   c. Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Section II

Please answer the following questions by circling how you will respond in a given situation.

8. If you were on The Jerry Springer Show and someone on the panel lied on you, you would:  
   a. Tell that person he/she is lying  
   b. Hit that person  
   c. Pick up a chair and hit that person

9. If a person breaks into a car, someone should:  
   a. Report it to the police  
   b. Beat him/her real bad  
   c. Shoot him/her

## APPENDIX B: CONTIUNED

10. In New York Undercover, I think the most violent episodes are where:
  - a. Family members hurt one another
  - b. Police are involved in the crime
  - c. Gang wars where almost everybody is killed
11. I like television programs where:
  - a. Little blood is shed
  - b. Some blood is shed
  - c. A lot of blood is shed
12. I think when you fight, you should:
  - a. Hit the person three times
  - b. Hit the person twenty times
  - c. Hit the person until they are bleeding or can no longer fight back
13. I think guns should be used for:
  - a. Self defense only
  - b. To scare someone
  - c. To murdered someone
14. I think \_\_\_\_\_ is the most violent type of programs:
  - a. Action Adventure cartoons(Power Rangers, Ninja Turtles, Warriors)
  - b. Cop Shows
  - c. Action Adventure shows(N.Y. Undercover, Rambo)
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
15. I think \_\_\_\_\_ should not be seen by kids:
  - a. The Simpson's
  - b. Beavis and Butthead
  - c. Southpark
  - d. None of the above

Please answer the following questions as 1=never, 2=sometimes, and 3=always

- |   |         |             |          |
|---|---------|-------------|----------|
| 16. I watch television alone                          | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |
| 17. I watch television with my<br>peers/siblings      | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |
| 18. I watch television with my<br>parents/supervision | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |

## APPENDIX B: CONTINUED

- |  |         |             |          |
|--|---------|-------------|----------|
| 19. I like to watch war cartoons<br>(Power Rangers)  | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |
| 20. I like to watch action packed<br>movies          | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |
| 21. I like to watch family<br>programs(Fresh Prince) | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |
| 22. I like to watch comedies(Martin)                 | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always |

**Section III**

Please answer the following questions as 1=never, 2=sometime, 3=always

- |  |         |             |           |
|--|---------|-------------|-----------|
| 23. I get excited when I see<br>fighting on television | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 24. I want to fight when I see<br>fighting on T.V.     | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 25. I imitate characters on<br>television              | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 26. I used violence from T.V. to<br>solve problems     | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 27. Television shows me new<br>ways to fight           | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 28. Television teaches me about<br>Life                | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 29. I identify myself with<br>characters on television | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3= always |
| 30. I believe the stories I see<br>on television       | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |
| 31. I understand the programs I<br>watch on television | 1=never | 2=sometimes | 3=always  |

## APPENDIX B: CONTINUED

32. Television teaches me how to behave	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
33. I like watching bloody television programs	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
34. I like shows that involve a lot of fighting	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
35. I like to watch programs with a lot of action	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
36. I watch a lot of programs that involve killing	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
37. When someone is killed on T.V., I feel happy	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
38. I get tense and anxious, when I watch T.V.	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
39. I like to behave like the characters I see on T.V.	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always
40. I like to watch program in which I could imitate	1=never	2=sometimes	3=always

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